



Image courtesy of the Member

Jim Costa

1952–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2005–
DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

Jim Costa has dedicated his career to improving the quality of life and opportunities for the people of California's San Joaquin Valley so they can realize the promise of the American Dream. Costa is the grandson of Portuguese immigrants. Three of his four grandparents could neither read nor write, and his parents did not speak English until they were in first grade. Costa's grandparents scratched out a living working in dairies until they were able to save enough money to establish their own. Growing up, Costa worked on the family dairy and he now farms almonds. "Agriculture continues to be one of the major economic engines in California, providing the country with California's finest products," Costa said on the House floor in 2008. "As agriculture evolves, it is essential that our policies be based on current needs of this vital industry."

James Manuel Costa was born in Fresno, California, on April 13, 1952, to Manuel and Lena Cardoso Costa. He graduated from San Joaquin Memorial High School in 1970 and earned his bachelor's degree in political science from California State University, Fresno, in 1974. While in college, Costa worked as an intern in the office of U.S. Representative B. F. Sisk (D-CA). After college, Costa spent two years working as an aide to U.S. Representative John Krebs (D-CA), before becoming chief of staff to California state assemblyman and future U.S. Representative Richard Lehman (D-CA).

In 1978, Costa won a seat in the state assembly alongside his former boss Lehman. Over the next 16 years, he championed his district's agricultural and water interests and pushed for better rail access and health care services. In 1994, he was elected to the state senate, where he served for eight years until term limits forced him to retire in 2002. He was named the Kenneth L. Maddy Institute of Public Affairs Professor at California State University, Fresno, in 2003. He also started a successful consulting firm during that period.

When U.S. Representative Calvin M. Dooley (D-CA) announced his retirement from the House at the end of the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Costa entered the race to fill the open seat. As a lifelong native of the San Joaquin Valley, Costa launched his campaign with strong credentials, including wide name recognition. He defeated Dooley's former chief of staff in the hotly-contested primary, before defeating Republican state senator Roy Ashburn by 4.47 percent in the general election. Costa ran unopposed in 2006, and in 2008, he won with an overwhelming 74.3 percent of the vote. His closest re-election

to date came in 2010, when he defeated his Republican opponent by 3.4 percent of the vote.

Costa represents the Democratic-leaning 20th District of California, comprising all of Kings and parts of Fresno and Kern counties in the Central Valley. Costa's district is one of the richest agricultural regions in the world with all three counties ranking among the top-10 agricultural producing counties in the United States.

During his tenure in the House, Costa has served on three committees: Agriculture (109th–112th, 2005–2013), Natural Resources (109th–112th, 2005–2013), and Foreign Affairs (109th–111th, 2005–2011).¹ He was Chairman of the Natural Resources' Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources from the 110th–111th Congress (2007–2011), and in the 112th Congress (2011–2013) he serves as the Ranking Member of the Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Rural Development, Research, Biotechnology and Foreign Agriculture.

Costa's committee assignments reflect his chief legislative priorities and the needs of his district. He is dedicated to protecting and enhancing agricultural production in the U.S. Costa has also been a strong advocate for bringing additional water to the Valley and expediting the construction of water infrastructure projects. His focus on water reliability and water quality issues led him to co-found the Congressional Water Caucus. On the Foreign Affairs panel, he has worked each Congress to pass a resolution to officially recognize the Armenian genocide. In 2006, Costa co-founded the bipartisan Congressional Victims' Rights Caucus, and has consistently introduced legislation to draw awareness to National Crime Victims' Rights Week. The Victims' Rights Caucus has also been vocal on improving the Violence Against Women Act and the Victims of Crime Act.

Costa is a member of the Blue Dog Coalition, a caucus of fiscally-conservative Democrats, and believes it is important to work with his colleagues across the aisle. "I'm not Pollyannish about it, but I would like to be part of the force encouraging bipartisanship in Congress."

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, "Jim Costa," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

NOTES

- 1 At the conclusion of the 109th Congress, the Resources Committee was renamed Natural Resources.